one for the runners

by Anthony M. Powers

it always takes too long to figure it out
and before you know what you really are
there's a long line of bodies lying in your wake
all convulsing, their faces turned away
and you can't go back because you know
they'd kill you if you did
so you keep moving forward
because there's nowhere else for you to go
eventually you forget to look over your shoulder
and everything seems fine again
then one night you wake up in a cold sweat
and all you can think is "what the hell happened?"
and it all turns into a long list of maybes
like maybe i should have tried harder
maybe it was me and not the other way around
maybe i am the fucking devil
maybe i'll die alone
and there's nothing that fixes it
and you just keep going going going
and you should have bought shoes with better support
instead of wearing those stupid Chuck Taylors
every waking moment of your life
and you even though you've never stopped
for more than a few moments here and there
you're completely out of shape
and the further away you get
the closer it all seems
and you can't remember what regret means anymore
and the more it breathes down the back of your neck
the stale breath of that goddamn monkey on your back
it smells like cigarettes and lipstick and old books

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and then you're choking on it
you're choking
choking
and it all caves in
and in the moment
your face turns blue
the maybes disappear
and choking
i should have tried harder
it was me and not the other way around
i am the fucking devil
i'll die alone
choking